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Adoption of the report of the Forum on its fourth session

Draft report

Forest conservation and protected areas (programme element II.d (iii))

Conclusions

1. The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) noted the outcome of the in-depth study on the theme "International forest conservation: protected areas and beyond", sponsored by the Government of Australia, and the recommendations of the international expert meeting on protected forest areas sponsored by the Governments of the United States of America and Brazil.

2. The Forum recognized the importance of an ecosystem approach which underlines forest conservation and protection as an integral component of sustainable forest management. The establishment and management of protected forest areas within an ecosystem approach can contribute significantly to local economies and non-market benefits to society in the form of flood control, soil and watershed protection, and other ecological services essential to human well-being.

3. The Forum acknowledged that existing protected areas are important in protecting a number of forest values and represent considerable effort and achievement on the part of all concerned in their establishment and management. However, it was noted that fragmentation of forest land may be a constraint to the effective protection of biodiversity and ecological functions of forest areas. In a number of countries, existing protected areas are not, in themselves, sufficient to maintain forest conservation objectives. Forest conservation cannot be based solely on a rigid demarcation between protected areas and all other forms of land use, in particular commercial forest use. Where possible, protected areas should form part of a landscape continuum, where the conservation of biological diversity, environmental services and other values are also accorded priority in the wider context of other forest management and land-use practices in surrounding areas.

4. Most countries have adopted legislation, policies and strategies towards landscape management, biological diversity, forest conservation and protected areas. However, implementation and enforcement of these policies and laws in many countries is inadequate. Insufficient coordination of conflicting policies and practices, inappropriate implementation strategies and lack of political will and financial and human resources are widely recognized as the major reasons for the failure to achieve forest conservation goals in some countries. The effectiveness of the management of protected areas can be assessed in terms of security of status through the implementation

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of appropriate legislation, the effectiveness of protection of biodiversity and ecological values, institutional capacity, positive social impacts and the level of support from indigenous and local communities (including indigenous people and other forest-dependent people practising traditional lifestyles, forest owners and local communities, many of whom possess important traditional forest-related knowledge; see General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 37), and adequate financial support at both the national and international levels.

5. There are several existing categories of protected areas. The one developed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas is being used by many countries, United Nations institutions and major groups. IUCN is currently working with other organizations and countries to interpret the categories for use in national and international statistics. The categories need to be more flexible in order to encompass the wide range of forest protection regimes existing in various countries. There is also a need to develop common understanding on the key concepts, definitions and terminology concerning management regimes consistent with forest conservation inside and outside protected areas. In establishing and managing protected forest areas and identifying them with appropriate categories, consideration should be given to their value as representative of unique forest types, their potential to generate information on ecological processes, conservation of biodiversity and environmental services, and their impact on the indigenous and local communities and others depending on them for sustenance.

6. The forest sector is affected by policies that concern both public- and private-sector activities and by activities in other sectors. Many non-forest-sector policies, such as those related to regional development, resettlement, trade, structural adjustment and agriculture, may have intended or unintended profound perverse impacts on forest conservation goals. The success of efforts to achieve forest conservation will be enhanced with effective cross-sectoral linkages and coordination.

7. A greater awareness of the social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits, especially biological resources, of forest conservation and protected forest areas can help to generate public support and resources for forest conservation. Many civil society actors have an interest in forest conservation. The convergence of interests of indigenous and local communities and of protected forest areas needs to be further explored and identified so as to allow the effective participation of all interested parties. A variety of partnerships and international cooperation schemes, operating at different geographical scales at national and international levels and with different objectives, may be useful to the support of forest conservation and protected areas.

Proposals for action

8. The Forum recalled the proposals made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests for action relevant to this programme element (see, in particular, E/CN.17/1997/12, paras. 17 (f), 17 (i), 58 (b) (v), 67 (f) and 77 (f)).

9. The Forum invited countries to implement, with the assistance of international organizations, donor countries and financial institutions, the proposals for action of this new programme element through partnership mechanisms involving, where appropriate, the participation of governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and indigenous and local communities.

10. The Forum encouraged countries to:

(a) Commit themselves to the protection, conservation and representativeness of all types of forests, consistent with national forest policies and programmes that recognize the linkage between forest conservation and sustainable development. This commitment may be achieved through a range of conservation mechanisms, reflecting varying national circumstances, applied within and outside of protected forest areas, and the complementary roles of protected forest areas and other sustainable forest management activities — for example, the production of wood and non-wood products and services, where forest conservation is promoted by other means;

(b) Develop and implement appropriate strategies for the protection of the full range of forest values, including cultural, social, spiritual, environmental and economic aspects; recognition of the multiple functions and sustainable use of all types of forests, with particular regard to biological diversity; participation of communities and other interested

parties; integration of the livelihood needs of indigenous and local communities; and planning and management on an ecosystem basis, in which special emphasis should be put on the continued integrity of genetic diversity;

(c) Develop and implement forest management mechanisms, as appropriate, that provide for partnerships and the participation of forest owners and of indigenous and local communities in support of forest conservation initiatives for sustainable forest management within the legal framework of each country;

(d) Develop financial support mechanisms to engage all interested parties, in particular forest owners and the private sector, in the planning and management of protected forest areas; and recognize protected forest areas under the stewardship of private forest owners or indigenous and local communities;

(e) Develop and apply consistently, as needed, criteria based on the adequacy, consistency and effectiveness of protected areas, following an ecosystem approach and incorporating reserve design principles that identify the need for new protected areas critical to the protection and maintenance of environmental services. In this regard, consideration should be given to linking protected areas, where possible, with corridors and buffer zones in order to form networks;

(f) Develop and implement a range of innovative mechanisms for financing and encouraging forest conservation, including economic incentives, voluntary guidelines, forest regulations, private contracts, taxes and charges, reinvestment of returns from protected areas, forest-related industries, and environmental services in forest conservation; tax deductions for private forest conservation; direct charges for protected area use; and possible returns from carbon sequestration, in accordance with, and within the context of the implementation of relevant articles of the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;

(g) Contribute to a global and regional assessment of the current status of protected forest areas, including total number, extent of each area, objectives of establishment, effectiveness of management, IUCN-system equivalent category, and basic biological and social information available. This can assist in the establishment of bio-geographically balanced networks of protected forest areas.

11. The Forum encouraged countries that share ecologically important or unique transboundary forests to establish joint protected forest areas, including ecological corridors of regional and/or global significance, and establish agreed guidelines concerning their collaborative management.

12. The Forum called upon countries, international financial institutions and other donors to provide financial support and other resources to activities in developing countries related to forest conservation and to the implementation and management of protected areas in the surrounding landscape, in accordance with national action plans, where such plans exist, through, *inter alia*, institutional strengthening and capacity-building; research and education and public awareness; promotion of access, development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies; and technical and scientific cooperation.

13. The Forum encouraged countries, relevant international organizations and institutions to cooperate in developing methodologies for assessing the conditions and management effectiveness in existing protected forest areas and the surrounding landscape and in protected forest area networks, taking into account the various efforts under way in several countries to build further capacity to collect, organize, utilize and share information and experience, including indigenous and local knowledge, in order to create and manage protected forest areas.

14. The Forum invited countries, relevant international organizations and institutions to work collectively to develop further guidelines for consistency in the interpretation and use of existing IUCN categories of protected areas for application in a national context, and to develop a global approach for assessing the effectiveness of protected forest area management in relation to environmental, social, cultural and other relevant objectives.

15. The Forum urged countries, international financial institutions and other donors to improve coordination, at both the national and international levels, of policies and programmes that affect forest conservation and to address cross-sectoral policies, structural adjustment packages and perverse incentives.